

## HLS Secretary Ridge Visits NORAD–USNORTHCOM

### Press Release

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PETERSON AFB, Colo. Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge visited North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command Nov. 17, saying he wanted to publicly emphasize how closely connected his department is with the commands.



Ridge said he also wanted to demonstrate the extraordinary progress HLS and USNORTHCOM have made in the short period of time we've existed.

Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge and Navy Capt. Brad Johanson discuss the capabilities of the United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) Domestic Warning Center (DWC). Secretary Ridge visited NORAD and USNORTHCOM to "publicly emphasize" how closely connected the Department of Homeland Security is with the commands.

Photo credit: Petty Officer 1st Class Shane Wallenda, USN

Adm. Timothy J. Keating, NORAD and USNORTHCOM commander, provided the secretary a command overview and then discussed mutual projects, potential initiatives and ways to enhance the relationship between NORAD–USNORTHCOM and HLS.

Later, Ridge and Keating held a joint–press conference where Ridge told reporters, "My visit here was primarily to emphasize in a public way, how closely connected we are not just in terms of mission statement but in terms of information sharing."

Getting good, timely, accurate information that can be acted upon is the most important ingredient in successful engagement of the enemy," Ridge said. He said it is also important for HLS and USNORTHCOM to have the same situational awareness.

According to Ridge, Americans should find comfort in the fact that the 24–hour daily operation centers at HLS and USNORTHCOM are connected and regularly call each other to ensure Internet and telephone connections are working properly.

Ridge listed other HLS agencies connected to USNORTHCOM, including the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Air and Marine Interdiction Unit in California, which monitors aircraft entering U.S. airspace. This connection, Ridge said, allows HLS and NORAD–USNORTHCOM to pull our heads together and decide what, if any,

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action should be taken if there's a flight we're not comfortable with, or if there's an anomaly or aberration.

The National Targeting Center in Virginia, which tracks the names of commercial airline passengers, also is connected to the commands, so if there is a troublesome name, or names, we can share that information instantaneously," Ridge said. "We need to be connected; we need to share personnel."

Ridge said he and Keating discussed assigning additional HLS members to USNORTHCOM and vice versa to better facilitate communications and ensure decisions are made in a timely manner. Personnel exchanges would involve primarily intelligence analysts, Ridge said.

This was Ridge's first visit to NORAD and USNORTHCOM since becoming head of HLS three years ago. Ridge, who was twice elected governor of Pennsylvania, assumed the secretary's job in January 2003. Prior to that he was director of the Office of Homeland Security, which was created in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Like Ridge's department, USNORTHCOM was created in response to the 2001 terrorist attacks. The command's mission is defending the United States and its territories and coordinating civil support during a presidential declared disaster or emergency.

Also in the wake of 9–11, NORAD's mission expanded to include looking for threats coming from inside as well as outside North America. Ridge said NORAD and USNORTHCOM share with HLS the mission of defending the United States.

Ridge arrived at Peterson AFB Tuesday and met HLS employees assigned to NORAD and USNORTHCOM at a breakfast Wednesday at the Peterson AFB officer's club.

"Secretary Ridge expressed his appreciation for the superb work of NORAD and USNORTHCOM in the national homeland security effort," said Mike Perini, director of public affairs at NORAD and USNORTHCOM.

Responding to rumors that he plans to resign from HLS, Ridge told reporters: "If and when that decision is made it will be more appropriate to communicate that first to the president."